

SEARCH CRITERIA

Model	Model C: Technological Development Model
Industry	Dairy
Focus/Level	Industry
Purpose	Testing available knowledge, increasing knowledge
Outcomes	Development of a management practice, Development of a specific technology
Special Interest Groups	Other
Design and Implementation	Designed by researchers experts managed by farmers/community, designed and managed by farmers/community

1. PROJECT NAME:

Profitable Pastures Project

(NSW 008 – Improving Profitability through effective pasture based feeding – Stage 1)

(UWS11040 – Improving Profitability through effective pasture based feeding – Stage 2)

2. FUNDERS:

Funds were provided by the Dairy Research and Development Corporation and made available through the Dairy Industry Development Company (DIDCO)

3. PROVIDERS:

University of Western Sydney

New South Wales Agriculture

Charles Sturt University

4. KEY CONTACTS:

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5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY:

This project was based in the dairy industry of New South Wales

6. PROJECT CONTEXT:

The Profitable Pastures Project (Improving Profitability through effective pasture based feeding) began in 1999 and its first phase ended in 2001. Stage 2 of the project will continue until June 2003. The project originated from a consensus within DIDCO that research relating to the feedbase was of prime importance to its constituents. A joint project emerged, in which the research team believed that the farmers need to have ownership of the research and gain confidence to assess the relevance of existing technology to their farming systems.

Ten learning groups associated with PPP were formed in 5 dairy regions from Taree to Bega and as far west as Forbes. Progress has varied considerably across the groups but *six* groups have initiated measurement and \ or monitoring activities and are recording data. Groups in the Hunter Valley will join the project in Stage 2.

7. PROJECT NICHE (SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES):

The objectives of the project were to:

- Establish the range of feed base management systems and enable farmers to identify current limitations and issues confronting these systems;
- Conduct farmer-participatory research to address specific feed base issues; and
- Improve farmer confidence to assess the suitability of various practices for adoption in order to improve profitability.

8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH:

The philosophical approach in this program *is* to use action learning and action research as a base to ensure that learning involves farmers at every point. Farmers have the prime responsibility for planning and managing their own research and learning activities, and funds are allocated to the farmer groups for this purpose.

Membership of the learning groups *is* open and an unstated aim *is* to involve as many farmers in the district as possible.

9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES:

The resources for this project *are*:

Funds: Approximately \$70 000 per annum

Personnel: 20 from NSW Agriculture and
5 from the Universities (Western Sydney and Charles Sturt)
60 farmers approximately

Time: All of the 10 groups *are* visited by members of the leadership team to talk about the project, its process and *the* monitoring *their activities*. Most groups have a departmental extension officer, *or some other local* person, to whom they can refer for advice and support. The project also has a part time coordinator (full time in Stage 2). The Leadership Team (comprising representatives from CSU, UWS, NSW Ag. and two farmers) sees its role as facilitating the learning within the groups, communicating outcomes across groups, evaluating the progress of the project as a whole, and generally providing leadership.

Teleconferences (about 2 per year) assist communication between the groups. A conference, involving participants from all groups, and invited speakers, was also held towards the end of the first phase of the project and funds were distributed for travel and accommodation.

10. PROCESS/METHODS USED:

The process of action research, which is used by the leadership team to develop and maintain the project, operates on at least two levels. The leadership team use this method to modify their own practice and also use it with the farmers to modify implementation of the project.

There is an expectation that farmers would also use the process to implement and review the project at ground level.

This project has used on farm trials and discussion sessions as a way of involving farmers. In some cases host monitor farms were used and in other cases farmers tried different methods of pasture management on their own farms.

11. IMPACTS TO DATE (AND EVALUATION APPROACHES USED):

An evaluation of the project found that:

The use of an action research process had merit because farmers felt in control, and in most groups, they were closely involved with most aspects of the trials. Although some of their supporting comments indicated variations in opinion about the detail of the process, they were clear that it was farmer driven and dealt with on farm issues.

There was also an expectation that this project would benefit all farmers not just those directly involved. Benefits to these farmers was through gaining information from the trials.

Another major impact was the coverage of this project. A survey of group leaders showed that on average 51.8% of all farmers in their districts were directly involved in the project and that 83.5% were indirectly involved.

The evaluation report is available from Dr Alan Andrews – University of Western Sydney.

12. EFFECTIVENESS:

high

Coverage of target group

This project attempted to reach as many dairy farmers as possible in the districts where it was active. They managed to do this. In some districts all dairy farmers were directly or indirectly involved and in most there were about 70% of farmers involved.

Ability to create change

This project created change for those farmers who were directly involved such as the host farmers and those who took part in trials. Change also came about because dairy farmers were put into an environment where they could talk to each other about herd and pasture management.

Ability to create learning communities

This project created learning communities but there was no formal expectation that these communities would last beyond the life of the project. However, most groups indicated that they would continue.

Ability to create support of each other in the farming target group

There were some statements in the evaluation report that farmers supported each other. This was ad hoc rather than a planned part of the project.

13. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE:

Jennings, J; Andrews, A.; Friend M.; and Srishandarajah, N. 2001, 'Taking the reigns: Farmer-driven Learning, Innovation and Extension for Profitable Dairy Pasture Production in New South Wales', paper delivered at the agronomy conference Hobart 2001.

Jennings, J. and Packham, R.G 2000, 'Action Research and Issues of Participation in the NSW Dairy Industry', paper presented to the ALARPM conference, Ballarat Sept 2000

Jennings, J. and Packham, R.G 2001. 'Extension's Big Bang and Genealogy: How Long-Run History Can Inform Current And Future Practice', paper presented at the APEN conference Toowoomba 2001.

Jennings, J., A. Andrews, M.Ison, N. Sriskandarajah, and M. Friend undated, 'On-Farm Action Research And Learning: Progress Of The Profitable Pastures Project In New South Wales Dairying' paper presented at Massey University NZ.

Profitable Pastures Project 2001, Conference Proceedings, held at ANU, Canberra.

Roberts, Kate 2001, *Review of Learning Process in the Profitable Pastures Project*, Unpublished report for the University of Western Sydney, Roberts Research and Evaluation Pty Ltd.

14. ISSUES:

One issue with this project was the use of the action research process to measure and modify their project. The process was not well understood by the farmers. The use of the action research process by the leadership team was effective to garner support from farmers and to make them feel involved in control. However, farmers did not have enough practice or knowledge of the process to use it themselves.

15. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:

This project was useful to farmers and implemented in such a way that farmers felt in control. The leadership team used the action research process to ensure that they made modifications based on what was happening on the ground and this meant that farmers were not left out of the process.

The coverage of the target group was comprehensive and this may have been because of farmer to farmer contact and word of mouth that this was a useful project.

16. REVIEW METHODS:

The project leadership team adopted an action research approach to the review of its own activities